

## Report by the FAccT Executive Committee on the Recent EC Statement on Gaza

On **April 18** the Executive Committee was asked to make a statement about Gaza. The EC released a statement on AI Warfare on **May 24**.

Following private and public responses, on **May 28** the EC withdrew that statement and apologized for it, adding a further call for an end to the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

On **May 29** ACM advised the EC that ACM has a policy that conferences are not to make public statements such as these, and instructed us to take down statements that were noncompliant with that policy. The EC then, **June 1**, added additional text to clarify that EC statements do not represent the views of the ACM. On **July 3**, a representative of the EC met with the ACM CEO, Vicki Hanson, to resolve the matter and was advised that the ACM would not approve the 2025 conference until the statement on Israel and Gaza was removed from the FAccT website. Vicki Hanson's letter is linked below.

As far as the Executive Committee can tell, the ACM adopted a policy on public statements [for the first time](#) in **April 2024** (this is the first online record we can find; we have asked ACM to clarify when the policy was adopted). ACM then [amended](#) this policy on **June 21 2024** (this has been confirmed by ACM).

The Executive Committee notes the following.

1. We were not informed by ACM that it was considering adopting a policy on public statements, nor were we notified of the policy when it was adopted.
2. The original policy, which was in place when we made our statement, clearly did not apply to subunits of the ACM such as individual conferences that ACM sponsors. The June 21 amendment revised the policy to make its application to subunits clear.
3. Setting aside the merits or otherwise of this particular statement, we are concerned that ACM is using FAccT's dependence to intervene in our operation in a way that seems to be driven by the specific content of our statement, as distinct from some procedural or other mis-step on our part.
4. Compounding this concern, the unpredictable way in which ACM has introduced and applied this policy, as well as the vagueness of the policy itself, makes it unclear to us what kind of constraint it places on future public statements that the FAccT EC or others in the conference would be inclined to make.
5. While we lack full transparency into ACM's decision-making, we underscore that there is some evidence to suggest that this constitutes viewpoint discrimination by ACM in apparent conflict with ACM policy.

The EC is instructed by the FAccT bylaws to "execut[e] the strategic vision of the conference as outlined in the Strategic Plan". The above facts place some of our strategic goals in apparent conflict.

6. Goal 5 in the strategic plan states that FAccT must "maintain independence of governance". While FAccT is an ACM conference, and so is not in that respect independent—and has complied with all other ACM policies—the EC thinks that the introduction of this new ACM policy, without either consulting FAccT or its representatives beforehand, or advising us of its introduction after the fact, places this strategic goal in question.
7. Notwithstanding the above, the viability of the 2025 conference depends on ACM's support. We also note that ACM has been a generous and effective supporter of the conference for the duration of our association with them. Our other strategic goals all clearly favor making sure that the conference takes place on schedule.

In light of the above, the FAccT EC sought and received approval from the Steering Committee for the following course of action.

1. The Executive Committee removes the Israel/Gaza statement from the website, replacing it for transparency with this document, thereby enabling planning for FAccT 2025 to proceed.
2. The EC writes to the ACM Council, thanking them for their support for FAccT hitherto, but advising them of our concerns about the procedural irregularity of adopting policies without (a) consulting those affected by them or (b) publicizing them to those whose behavior they are supposed to constrain; we would also express our concerns regarding the further irregularity (c) of applying policies retrospectively only to specific statements. We also propose (d) exploring the merits of the claim that this is viewpoint discrimination in conflict with ACM's other policies. Our hope here is to give the ACM an opportunity to work towards a mutually acceptable resolution.
3. The Steering Committee meets in due course to discuss the possibility of FAccT either becoming independent or else seeking an alternative legal backer in a future year, after a carefully managed transition. This discussion would take into consideration ACM's response to point (2), and the different competing goals that would factor into such a decision.

The EC also reaffirms that we will be forming a subcommittee of the steering committee to review the events chronicled above, and to decide on FAccT's own policy regarding making public statements.

Additional documents:

[Letter from ACM CEO to FAccT Executive Committee](#) concerning the statement on Gaza.

FAccT and ACM's legal relationship is described in [this document](#) from May 2018.